

## PRACTICES OF EUROPEAN ENLIGHTENMENT IN 18<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY RUSSIA

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### EMPIRE, SPECTACLE AND THE PATRIOT KING: BRITISH RESPONSES TO THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN EMPIRE\*

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The author uses examples of British travellers' responses to Russian tsars' spectacles to argue that the British view of the Russian Empire in the eighteenth century fosters a contradiction. Traditionally Russia was depicted as an imperial Other in which British liberty and its attachment to reason is contrasted with Russian servility within the autocratic state and Russian citizens' irrational attachment to tradition. Yet British writers complicate this depiction with Peter the Great, and later tsars, who are depicted frequently as enlightened reformers. Indeed, British travellers' depictions of tsars' spectacles at once foreground the tsar's enlightened reforms and the tsar's person, but also are characterized as limiting the spectators' capacity to reason and to pursue liberty. The author maintains that this contradiction is accommodated in the British thought by Bolingbroke's notion of a reform-minded patriot king and Russia's often-portrayed middle position between East and West.

*Keywords:* Peter the Great; Britons in Russia; Bolingbroke; travel literature.

Обращаясь к описаниям представлений, устраиваемых русскими царями, в трудах британских путешественников, автор показывает противоречивый характер британского взгляда на Российскую империю XVIII в. Россия традиционно изображалась как «чужая» империя, а приверженность Британии свободе и разуму противопоставлялась духу несвободы самодержавного государства и иррациональной тяге русского народа к традициям. Однако британские авторы рассказывали в своих отзывах о русских царях, таких как Петр I и его последователи, изображая их как просвещенных монархов. Впечатления британцев о зрелищах, устраиваемых царями, с одной

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стороны, акцентируют внимание на личностях русских монархов и их реформах и, с другой, иллюстрируют ограниченность народа и его неспособность рассуждать здраво и бороться за свободу. Автор утверждает, что это противоречие сформировалось в представлении британцев о России под влиянием идей Болингброка о царе-реформаторе и России как стране, занимающей промежуточное положение между Востоком и Западом.

*Ключевые слова:* Петр Великий; британцы в России; Болингброк; путевые заметки.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Russian Empire, serving as an imperial Other [Neumann, pp. 65–112; Pagden, p. 46; Wolff, pp. 10–13],<sup>1</sup> was considered by the English as ‘remote, backward, and except as a source of supply for a few raw materials, fundamentally unimportant’ [Anderson, p. 202]. Giles Fletcher molds this notion, for instance, in his Dedication to Queen Elizabeth in *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (1591);<sup>2</sup> he reports to Queen Elizabeth that his work reveals ‘A true and strange face of a *Tyrannical state* (most unlike to your own)’, adding that whereas the queen rules over ‘subjectes’, the czar rules over ‘slaves’. The perceived generosity of the queen and the contentment of her English subjects are contrasted with the severity of tsardom and servility of Russian citizens. Not only are Russians ‘slaves’ in an autocratic state, but also they fail to sufficiently exercise their reason because they remain excessively attached to outdated customs and traditions.<sup>3</sup> In *The Present State of Russia* (1671), Samuel Collins, personal physician to Tsar Aleksey Mikhailovich (r. 1645–76), endorses Fletcher’s conclusion, noting that ‘the Russian Boors [are] perfect Slaves’ and adds: ‘To things improbable they easily give credit, but hardly believe what is rational and probable’ [Collins, p. 68].

This view of the Russian Empire as the Other, a servile and irrational populace in a tyrannical state, contrasts with the British view of their own burgeoning empire and its focus on liberty [Greene, 1998, p. 208]. Before 1760, as David Armitage [Armitage, 1999, p. 92; 2000, p. 8] maintains, the British Empire was conceived as ‘Protestant, commercial, maritime and free’, and ‘British republicans’ formulated this conception from an inherited dichotomy between liberty and greatness, which indicated how the pursuit of greatness would inevitably lead to the loss of ‘liberty both for the republic and for its citizens’ [Armitage, 2002, pp. 30–31]. This loss of liberty could be avoided by focusing on trade and commerce. ‘Republican moderation’ and

<sup>1</sup> For European notions of Russia as the Other, see Pagden: ‘While it remained... stubbornly an oriental despotism, Russia rested firmly within Asia, the backward barbaric empire of the steppes’ [Pagden, p. 46]; for Russia as the Other, see [Neumann].

<sup>2</sup> A. Cross notes how those who wrote on Russia in the seventeenth century, ‘essentially echoed Fletcher’s... prejudices’ [Cross 2000, p. 3].

<sup>3</sup> This attachment to tradition is particularly directed at the Orthodox Church; for example, see Fletcher: ‘Many... false opinions they have in matter of religion... which they holde partly by meanes of their traditions’ [Fletcher, p. 99]; also see Macartney, who comments upon ‘their superstitious and obstinate attachment to ancient customs’ [Macartney, pp. 40–41].

commerce would work together to promote liberty for the citizens and the monarch. Republican moderation originates from 'Old Whig' thought, according to J. G. A. Pocock, and 'Old Whigs' emphasize 'virtue' in the 'speculative man'; that is, a citizen must not be a 'slave of his passions, [and instead] he had to moderate these by converting them into opinion, experience and interest' [Pocock, p. 115]. Pocock's representative of this republican moderation, James Harrington, observes in *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656) that interest and reason are intertwined because 'reason be nothing else but interest, and the interest of mankind be the right interest, then the reason of mankind must be right reason' [Harrington, p. 98]. Propelling the British notion of liberty is the notion of republican moderation, which requires that citizens use their reason to realize their interest. Not only would republican moderation encourage citizens to avoid corruption at home by pursuing their interest and avoiding luxury, but also it would encourage the monarch to avoid corruption abroad by pursuing the state's interest by promoting trade rather than occupying lands. The 'most influential assessment' of this arrangement, according to Armitage [Armitage, 2002, p. 41], is expressed by the prominent Tory thinker, Bolingbroke, in his *The Idea of the Patriot King* (1738). Bolingbroke describes the patriot king: 'A king who esteems it his duty to support, or to restore... the free constitution of a limited monarchy; who forms and maintains a wise and good administration; who subdues faction, and promotes the union of his people: and who makes their greatest good the constant object of his government, may be said, no doubt, to be in the true interest of his kingdom' [Bolingbroke, p. 414]. While keeping a limited monarchy, the king should control party conflict as well as unify, govern and reform for the good of his people. Only then does he act in the true interest of his kingdom. Unfortunately, the balance that Bolingbroke sought between greatness and liberty with a patriot king proved 'unstable', according to Armitage [Ibid., p. 42], because 'British thinkers' could not endorse any particular monarch who could sufficiently reconcile empire and liberty.

Even though 'British thinkers' reject Bolingbroke's assessment, British travellers to the Russian Empire frequently endorse the tsar, beginning with Peter the Great,<sup>4</sup> as a type of patriot king. Although the tsar does not keep a traditionally English 'limited monarchy', he nonetheless subdues faction, promotes union, and most importantly reforms laws and customs for the good of his people in order to propel his subjects to greatness.<sup>5</sup> In *Peter the Great Through British Eyes* (Cross 2000), Anthony Cross has argued how Peter the Great became a symbol of the 'good monarch' [Ibid., p. 94], which was founded upon the 'Petrine myth' [Ibid., p. 49] that Peter was a 'reform-

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<sup>4</sup> British awareness of the Russian Empire and its influence on European affairs increased with Peter the Great's successes during the Great Northern War (1700–1721); see one of the better-known pamphlets of the early eighteenth century (1716) Gyllenborg's *The Northern Crisis, or Impartial Reflections on the Policies of the Czar*; [Gyllenborg], see also [Paine, pp. 492–493; Hartley, p. 55–62; Cross, 2000, p. 55; Neumann, p. 76].

<sup>5</sup> D. Armitage has discussed how the patriot king served a 'reformative purpose' [Armitage, 1997, p. 403] and how 'The very lack of specificity in Bolingbroke's description of the patriot king made it perennially applicable' [Ibid., p. 406].

ing tsar' [Ibid., p. 48] and as such a 'god of the Enlightenment' [Ibid., p. 66], who is 'bringer of light and the subduer of Nature' [Ibid., p. 69]. This notion of a tsar who reforms with a civilizing, rational spirit for the good of his people, acting in their interest, particularly in Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, obviously contrasts with Russia as Other, in which the autocratic state causes people to submit to servility and irrationally embrace outdated customs and conventions. Cross [Cross 2012, p. 4] states: 'the people as opposed to the potentate were the problem', and by the early eighteenth century, this dual view of barbarism in the people and enlightenment in the tsars creates a 'juxtaposition' that 'was obviously appealing to European, and British, minds' [Ibid., p. 48].

This study posits the incoherence of this British 'juxtaposition', particularly in the context of British debates upon greatness and liberty, by illustrating its contradiction in travellers' responses to the tsar's and imperial state's use of spectacle—that is, fireworks and illuminations – which at once demonstrates the reforming policies of the tsar and the greatness of the empire but also denies the spectators, and symbolically the citizens, of their capacity to reason. This contradiction indicates how the tsar's role as a type of patriot king and the Russian Empire's greatness may serve, instead, as a template for the development of 'enlightened' absolutism that emerges in the British Empire from the 1760s.

### Spectacle and the Imperial State

The English were certainly not unfamiliar with spectacle, as Paula Backscheider has demonstrated in Charles II's ascension to the throne in 1660. Charles II used spectacle to 'help secure his throne and establish his interpretation of the monarchy' [Backscheider, p. 2], to give 'the impression of the return of prosperity and happiness' [Ibid., p. 9] and to demonstrate the authoritative and rightful administration of 'Law' [Ibid., p. 11]. Spectacle similarly performed the role of justifying Peter the Great's reign, but in contrast to 'Law', British accounts of Russia indicate how spectacle functions more abstractly as a function of the state and the tsar's person to reform and act for the good of the kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

First appearing in Moscow and then in dazzling performances outside the Winter Palace, on and alongside the Neva in St. Petersburg, Peterhof, and on the estates of nobles,<sup>7</sup> fireworks frequently appeared with 'illuminations', which involved the placement of wooden models that depicted effigies, representations of gardens, exotic locations, cities, inscriptions, as well

<sup>6</sup> R. S. Wortman notes that Peter's 'ceremonies prepared the way for reform as the beginning of a new tradition' [Wortman, p. 26].

<sup>7</sup> Tooke observes that Petr Borisovich Sheremetev (1713–1787) held 'Dramatical representations, fireworks, illuminations, and dancing' at his Kuskovo estate outside Moscow [Swinton, p. 432], and when describing 'summer amusements', Swinton observes that at Alexander Sergeyevich Stroganov's (1733–1811) 'villa', he offered 'a display of various fireworks' [Swinton, p. 349].

as candles lit in the windows of buildings.<sup>8</sup> That the Russian Empire distinctly focused upon spectacle in its fireworks is a point stressed by Simon Werrett in *Fireworks: Pyrotechnic Arts and Sciences in European History* (2010), Werrett writes that the imperial state appeared to have no interest 'in creating more practical or profitable uses for fireworks outside spectacle' [Werrett, p. 130], and the performances consistently demonstrated that 'Russians emphasized the pleasure, rather than the artifice' [Ibid., p. 106]. British depictions of Russian fireworks and illuminations indicate that tsars and tsarinas used these performances as spectacle to entertain and awe spectators as well as promote the appearance of undisputed eminence and inherent legitimacy of the imperial state.<sup>9</sup>

The illuminations function as spectacle because they are performed before a public, offer an implicit and all-encompassing self-justification for the imperial state and hinder the spectator's critical thought.<sup>10</sup> In the seminal *Society of the Spectacle* (1970, originally in French 1967), Guy Debord argues that 'spectacle presents itself simultaneously as all of society, as part of society, and as instrument of unification' [Debord, Thesis 3], and that 'spectacle's form and content are identically the total justification of the existing system's conditions and goals' [Ibid., Thesis 6]. Not only does spectacle unify society and justify the existing order, but also it 'presents itself as something enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible' [Ibid., Thesis 12]. Since spectacle's appearance connotes good, then it is 'its own product, and... has made its own rules: it is a pseudo-sacred entity', and as such all 'community and all critical sense are dissolved' [Ibid., Thesis 25]. Spectacle creates the appearance of unity, implicitly justifies the existing system, appears comprehensively good and suspends critical thought. The spectacle of fireworks and illuminations at once represented the unity of the Russian state and justification for its greatness,<sup>11</sup> including the reforming tsar's policies,<sup>12</sup> but also it produced pleasure and stimulated emotions, which ultimately lead to the spectator's loss of discriminating faculties.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Indicating the difference between fireworks and illuminations, Watanabe-O'Kelly states, 'Unlike the firework display, [illuminations] are static presentations' [Watanabe-O'Kelly, p. 346].

<sup>9</sup> Salatino notes how fireworks serve to 'exalt the principles of monarchy and dynasty, to demonstrate power through expenditure, and to underline the fundamental distinction between court and the rest of society' [Salatino, pp. 1–2]; relating to Russia, Maggs states that with the 'celebration of the victory over the Turks at Azov in 1696, pyrotechnical displays began to be associated with secular events' and even 'monarchy' [Maggs, p. 27].

<sup>10</sup> The research on spectacle emphasizes its performative nature and how it hinders critical thought; see [Spielmann; Bakscheider; Schaffer; and Debord, particularly thesis 25].

<sup>11</sup> Watanabe-O'Kelly: 'the firework display and the illumination constituted the only sophisticated and technically advanced art forms to be accessible to the people *en masse*' [Watanabe-O'Kelly, p. 346].

<sup>12</sup> Salatino argues that fireworks reflect the sublime, and particularly the 'imperial sublime', in which they 'become a reflection of the grandiosity, the overweening ambition, of the emperor himself' [Salatino, p. 94].

<sup>13</sup> Bracco and Lebovici state that in response to the performance of fireworks, 'le petit peuple intériorise sans analyse les signes 'artificiels' du pouvoir' [Bracco and Lebovici, p. 17].

### General Patrick Gordon (1635–1699)

Demonstrating one of his ‘lifelong enthusiasms’ [Hughes, 2004, p. 29], Peter the Great commands General Patrick Gordon to prepare fireworks for pleasure. Gordon – a Scot, Jacobite, mentor, and favorite general of Peter – recounts in his diary how fireworks initially appeared in military drills and maneuvers, and then they evolved to promote the army’s ambitions, the young czar’s authority and the burgeoning empire.<sup>14</sup> Gordon records fireworks’ use in drills when he recounts, for instance, a tragic accident on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1691. His son-in-law, Rudolph Strasburg, ‘by a great misfortune burnt his head, hands, knees & feet’, because fireworks were fired from above, from which he ‘narrowly’ escaped, while three others were ‘burnt to death’ [Gordon, p. 78]. Unfortunately, Strasburg died of his wounds a year later. Apart from drills and maneuvers, in a letter on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1693, Gordon requested John Babington’s *Pyrotechnia* (1635), which outlines techniques for preparing and presenting displays of fireworks. Three days after his request, he writes: ‘I was by his M[ajesty, Peter the Great], who ordered me to make a *pyrotechnia* or fire-worke for pleasure’ [Gordon, p. 204]. When the young tsar commands Gordon to make fireworks ‘for pleasure’, Peter demonstrates his concern for bolstering his authority and his vision for the state. Not only did Peter formally serve as co-tsar with his incapacitated step-brother, Ivan V,<sup>15</sup> but he also clashed with his mother, Natalia Naryshkina, as he sought to assert his independence.<sup>16</sup> As such, Peter’s injunction highlights how he seeks to court and unify spectators as well as authorize his view of the tsardom, which is expressed through his vision and goals as rightful head of the imperial state. Additionally it underscores how pleasure, rather than a critical sense, functions as the basis of the imperial state’s display of fireworks and illuminations.

Gordon records his success in carrying out Peter’s command. Firstly, reporting on February 21<sup>st</sup>, he notes how fireworks were performed before Peter and foreigners in Peter’s service: ‘fyreworks fyred, which had pretty good effect, these being his M.[ajesty] & the strangers’. The next day he prepares a display for the general public: ‘The Russe fire-works fired, which had also good effect’ [Ibid., p. 223]. Whether for Peter, foreign members of Peter’s court and army, Peter’s subjects or Gordon’s officers, Gordon’s efforts appear to achieve the tsar’s stipulated purpose: that is, they offer pleasure for spectators.

<sup>14</sup> Salatino acknowledges fireworks’ role as ‘an essential form of early modern statecraft’ in which art becomes ‘an instrument of power’ [Salatino, p. 27]; see also: [Wortman, p. 23].

<sup>15</sup> L. Hughes: ‘from the political-religious perspective of Russia in the 1680s Ivan remained the senior tsar by God’s will’ [Hughes, 2004, p. 19].

<sup>16</sup> L. Hughes, notes that ‘clashes [between Peter and Natalia Naryshkina] seemed inevitable with a son determined to extend the relative freedom and independence which he enjoyed for most of Sophia’s regency’ [Hughes, 1998, p. 390].



### John Perry (1669/1670–1733)

The pleasure that fireworks offer the spectator subsequently functions as a reforming instrument in the hands of the tsar. In *The State of Russia, Under the Present Czar* (1716), John Perry, a hydraulic engineer recruited by Peter the Great during his Grand Embassy to England in 1698, indicates how the tsar used illuminations to justify and authorize his own rule and laws over the ostensibly unjustified traditions and customs of his Russian subjects.<sup>17</sup> That is, when attached to the tsar, the fireworks and illuminations represent the tsar's 'conditions and goals' triumphing over irrational Russian traditions, particularly when Peter decides to move Russia to the Julian calendar on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1700.<sup>18</sup> Perry remarks that, apart from tradition, the Russians had no clear reasons for adopting their calendar. He adds that they 'also reckon'd the first Day of their Year on the first of September, which they kept with very great Solemnity' [Perry, p. 235]. 'Disputants' maintained that it was on this date 'That God... who was all-wise and good, created the World in the Autumn, when the Corn was in its full Ear, and the Fruits of the Earth were ripe, and fit to take and eat' [Ibid., p. 235]. However, 'the Czar (sensible of their mistaken Notion) desired his Lords to view the Map of the Globe, and in pleasant temper gave them to understand, that Russia was not all the World' [Ibid., p. 235]. By pointing to the globe, Perry clearly depicts Peter as a 'sensible' or wise monarch who corrects the biases and prejudices of his people, preventing them from excessively relying upon custom and tradition. To mark the change in the calendar, Peter 'proclaimed a Jubilee, and commanded the same to be solemnized a whole Week together, with the firing of Guns, and ringing of Bells; and the Streets to be adorn'd with Colours flying in the Day, and Illuminations at Night, which all Houses of any Distinction were to observe' [Ibid., p. 236]. Adding to the function of fireworks as pleasure, Perry indicates how Peter uses them to justify his edicts and reforms. The spectacle creates unity and the appearance of authenticity by marking the fulfillment of his edict, which Peter commanded by rejecting the irrational demands of tradition. That is, much like a patriot king, Perry's description of the tsar's spectacle depicts him as a unifier and reformer.

Not only do fireworks and illuminations mark edicts, but they also distinguish significant imperial events, such as victories, weddings and treaties. Peter even incorporates allegorical figures with abstract values, screens and inscriptions, a model later used by his successors. These abstract values depicted through spectacle reinforce what Simon Dixon has identified as 'the notion of the impersonal state devoted to the common good,' which early eighteenth-century Russian political texts fortify by drawing from

<sup>17</sup> Cross observes that Perry's account initiates the 'British tradition of Petrine hagiography' [Cross, 2000, p. 48]. However, some signs of praising the tsar exist earlier, like Collins.

<sup>18</sup> L. Hughes observes how 'Peter's prescription for the celebration... provides an early example of enjoyment by decree, which specified the details, right down to the type of festive greenery to be set up in public spaces' [Hughes, 2004, p. 59].

Protestant natural law influences to develop a 'wider consciousness of "the state"' that ultimately contributed 'to a growing reverence for the individual monarch' [Dixon, p. 193; see also Wortman, p. 31–32]. Spectacle assisted in cultivating this reverence. Lindsey Hughes observes several examples that demonstrate how allegorical figures with abstract values were used to celebrate events in Peter's reign. After the defeat of Charles XII at the Battle of Poltava (1709), a display showed a 'Russian eagle shooting an arrow into the Swedish lion' [Hughes, 2004, p. 86]. In 1710, after the marriage of Peter's niece, Anna Ivanovna, to Frederick William, duke of Courland, crowns were depicted with two palm trees entwined with the inscription, 'Love Unites', and 'Cupid [was depicted] with his hammer and anvil welded together' with the inscription, 'Two joined together as one' [Hughes, 2002, p. 90]. Oftentimes, the tsar would personally explain the meaning of these illuminations, instructing the spectator how he should view and interpret the performance [Ibid., p. 90].

### **John Bell (1691–1780) and Peter Henry Bruce (1692–1757)**

Perry's attachment of fireworks and illuminations to the reforming and progressive spirit of a tsar who acts in the interest of the kingdom continues in John Bell's *Travels from St. Petersburg in Russia, to Diverse Parts of Asia* (1763) and Peter Henry Bruce's *Memoirs of Peter Henry Bruce, Esq.* (1782). Bell, who served in two Russian embassies to Persia (1715–1718) and China (1718–1722), returned to Moscow in 1722 where he found Peter and his court preparing to celebrate the end of the Great Northern War (1700–1721). Bell describes Peter's 'triumphant entry' into Moscow in a procession, which included a 'galley', 'frigate', 'barges', 'pilot-boats' and 'thirty other vessels' [Bell, vol. 2, p. 236–237]. Since the celebration 'was in the month of February, at which time all the ground was covered with snow, and all rivers frozen... all these machines were placed on sledges, and were drawn, by horses' [Ibid., p. 327]. In addition to this impressive procession, Bell notes that the festivities in Moscow included 'masquerades, grand fire-works, balls, assemblies, &c.' [Ibid., p. 325]. Similar to Perry, Bell acknowledges how Peter effectively uses the spectacle of the procession to influence his subjects: 'The Russians... had a strong aversion to shipping and maritime affairs. In order to apprise them of the great advantages arising from a marine force, in his triumphant entry into Mosco, he represented to his people that the peace... was obtained by means of his naval strength' [Ibid., p. 326]. That is, the spectacle of his entry into Moscow, a fleet drawn upon ice, demonstrates the indisputable justification of his policies, which includes building a navy, and indicates how it functions as a tool for the tsar to convince his subjects that he acts for their and the state's good. The diplomat approvingly remarks that Peter 'always [has] in view, even in his amusements, and times of diversion, all possible means of influencing his people to a liking of whatever



tended to promote the good of his empire' [Ibid., p. 326]. Bell provides a clear connection between the function of spectacle and Peter as a type of patriot king. The emperor uses spectacle as a means to reform; he convinces his recalcitrant subjects of the significance of a navy for prosperity, growth and security of the state. The spectacle influences his subjects to accept his policies and goals, and it depicts how these policies and goals are inherently good for the people and the empire.

Peter Henry Bruce, a military engineer who was trained in the Prussian army and served in Petrine Russia from 1711–1724, offers multiple examples of Peter using fireworks and illuminations to unify the people and state by marking edicts, celebrating victories, and above all providing pleasure. During Peter the Great's official marriage to Catherine, Bruce recounts that the 'entertainment was very splendid; the evening concluded with a ball and fire-works, and the city was illuminated the whole night' [Bruce, p. 71]. On this occasion, Hughes mentions that Peter himself 'was represented by Hymen... with a torch and eagle at his feet' with the inscription above, 'United in our love' [Ibid., p. 103]. On the birth of Peter's son, Peter Petrovich, in 1715, Bruce observes that the 'solemnities on this occasion were attended with most extraordinary pomp; as splendid entertainments, balls, fireworks', and 'in the evening a noble firework was played off... with several curious devices', one bearing the inscription, 'Hope with patience' [Ibid., p. 148]. Finally Bruce offers an account of illuminations during Catherine I's coronation in 1724: 'The whole night was spent in great rejoicings by fire-works, illuminations, bonfires, drums, music, and ringing of bells; the streets were swarmed all night long with crowds of people' [Ibid., p. 363]. On the fourth day of celebrations, 'her majesty gave a very grand entertainment, and in the evening was exhibited a magnificent fire-work, representing the emperor placing the crown on her head, with this motto, "From God and the Emperor;" the city was again completely illuminated, and universal joy displayed itself in every form' [Ibid.]. Bruce reinforces how the tsar's spectacle creates pleasure and joy for his subjects and authorizes the imperial events for the citizens. People of all ranks mind 'nothing but their own pleasures', and 'universal joy' occurs everywhere. Peter's inscriptions indicate abstract, self-justifying values, sometimes through his own person, that not only indicate how the state serves the common good but also how the tsar, the royal family and his dynasty demonstrate their legitimacy. Indeed the fireworks, illuminations and inscriptions demonstrate how spectacle unites the people and represents a comprehensively good experience that justifies the existing order, its goals and objectives, because they occur during and after significant events for the imperial state, such as royal family marriages, military victories and end-of-war treaties. After Peter's reign, fireworks and illuminations continue not only to mark imperial successes that celebrate the empire's expansion but also to awe and provoke passions while displaying allegorical figures that evolve towards representing abstract values of the tsar's person and the imperial state.

## Elizabeth Justice (1703–1752)

Elizabeth Justice's *A Voyage to Russia* (1739)<sup>19</sup> recounts a particular performance during Anna Ioannovna's (1730–1740) reign in which fireworks, lighted windows and allegorical effigies, which even represented the tsarina herself, contained inscriptions that point to abstract, state values.<sup>20</sup> Justice – a governess for the wealthy merchant Evans, in St Petersburg – writes:

In the Winter, they have very fine Illuminations, such as, I believe, there is not the like in any Place. They are Four Times a Year: Upon her Majesty's Birth-Day, the Day she was named, that of Her Coronation, and New Year's Day; the Yearly Expende of which is Fifty thousand Pounds. There is always before the Palace some particular Figure remarkably fine. I remember one Year there was Her Majesty, with the Figure of *Plenty* by Her; and the *Motto* was, BEYOND PRAISE. Sometimes there are the Figures of *Charity*, and *Justice*. I have seen several curious Representations, viz., A Garden so natural, that you would imagine you might gather Oranges from Trees: The Walls of *Peru*, some of which appeared to be broke down: Their Alphabet...; and their Academy, which is likewise beautifully illuminated. And, on the same Nights, they have very fine Rockets, and Bombs; which are play'd off before the Palace, not to be exceeded, if equaled [Justice, 1739, p. 22–23].

Much like Peter the Great's model of making himself a figure in the allegorical display, Anna Ioannovna commissions a figure for herself with an accompanying inscription. The tsarina stands as an allegorical figure alongside others such as charity, plenty, and justice, and these appear alongside exotic representations of gardens as well as lights in windows. While the inscription, 'Beyond praise', continues Peter the Great's model of inscriptions in illuminations, it goes beyond his reference to dynasty by directing the spectators to the tsarina herself, who has become an abstraction along with the values endorsed by the state. As abstractions, the state's values and tsardom have become at once indisputable and inaccessible, thereby creating the 'pseudo-sacred entity' that is the tsarina's person and the imperial state. Justice demonstrates how the fireworks, inscriptions, exotically manufactured images and community involvement, create spectacle as its 'own product', which is not only heard, seen and pondered but also participated in. As its own product, the illuminations include, according to Justice, their lavish cost: fifty thousand pounds.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Offering the first English account of the Russian Empire since John Perry, according to Patterson, Justice views the tsarina's illuminations from a position, as Cross observes, 'lower down the social scale' [Cross, 1997, p. 339].

<sup>20</sup> Maggs indicates how Russia transitioned from using fireworks and illuminations to celebrate 'events of national importance' to 'delivering extravagant panegyrics of the ruling monarch and nation' [Maggs, p. 30].

<sup>21</sup> Justice changes this number in a letter that is published in the second edition of her *Voyage to Russia*, in which she states that the "Expende is above Sixty thousand Pounds a Year" [Justice, 1746, p. 57].

In a letter dated Oct. 15<sup>th</sup> 1735, which was published in the second edition, she adds, 'and, in my Opinion, it is well worth it'. In the same letter she observes that the Russian illuminations are 'one Thing that I believe... exceed any Part of the World' [Justice, 1746, p. 57]. Justice's remarks on the illumination's incredible expense, its unsurpassed quality and her subsequent approbation demonstrate the powerful affect that they had upon her as a spectator. That is, even though the expense is enormous, the illumination's existence justifies itself and distinguishes it from all else.

### **Dr. John Cook (?–1790, dates in Russia: 1736–1750)**

Apart from their attachment to the tsar's enlightened reforms, British descriptions of fireworks and illuminations reinforce Peter's injunction to Gordon by demonstrating the emotional response within the discrete spectator. John Cook in *Voyages and Travels Through the Russian Empire, Tartary, and Part of the Kingdom of Persia* (1770) offers a clear account of pleasure in spectacle. Although published in 1770, Cook, a Scottish physician, travelled in Russia in 1736 and departed almost 15 years later. Cook entered Russia with no MD and later received his training as a surgeon at the naval hospital in St. Petersburg. He then transferred to Astrakhan and served as a physician to Prince Mikhail Golitsyn. In volume 1, chapter 25, Cook records the fireworks and illuminations:

Many very entertaining and magnificent fireworks were exhibited on the river Neva, and grand illuminations for the success of the Russian arms against the Turks, so expensive and grand that many people skilled in such works, said that they did not believe the like had ever been seen in any part of Europe: The rockets were terrible. The charge of each large one was said to weigh an extraordinary weight, and when they had risen to an immense height in the air, they burst with an explosion equal to that of a large cannon, and exhibited many fire balls, of various colours, falling down to the earth: a great variety of wheels, and many other things shoes names I am unacquainted with, were played off, so that in midnight, one might have seen as clearly as in mid-day. The grand illuminations were placed on a large timber building of two stories high, and a great length, erected on the north side of the river opposite the winter palace. The lamps exhibited flames of different colours, representing the last city or fortification taken from the Turks, such as Asoph, Perecop, Kinburn, Kinbam, &c. Before the fire works were played off, there was erected upon the river a large tall mast, on which was hung a white sheet of cloath, as broad as the sail of the largest ship of war, but longer, fire was put to this as the signal for beginning: The flame ran up the sheet instantly like a flash of lightning, but left upon it the figure of the city, for the honour of which the works were to be played off, in a deep and glossy fire which continued ten or twelve minutes, before the sheet was destroyed... the regularity and dispatch in performing these wonderful works no doubt surprised me, and they had much the same effect upon people more acquainted with them [Cook, pp. 99–100].

Cook's description demonstrates how the later tsarinas continue Peter's practice of using illuminations and fireworks to celebrate the imperial state's victories alongside the expansion of territory. During the Russo-Turkish Wars, Russian successes over the Turks provided the expanding empire with a foothold onto the Black Sea. These 'wonderful works' are indeed 'grand', symbolizing the empire's greatness, and like Justice, Cook mentions their lavish expense. The pleasure of this 'magnificent' performance awes the spectators, even those who were 'more acquainted' with the illuminations. That is, like Justice, the display represents its 'own product', thereby distinguishing it from all preceding performances. Such spectacle evokes an emotional response within him, exciting his passions. He describes the sounds and colors that affect his senses: the fireworks and illuminations stimulate his hearing and his sight, filling him with awe and impressing him with their power.

### William Richardson (1743–1814)

William Richardson, Cook's fellow Scot and traveller to the Russian Empire, [Richardson, p. 426], also reflects the latter's emotional response to fireworks and illuminations. Richardson was a professor of humanity at the University of Glasgow when his *Anecdotes of the Russian Empire* (1784) appeared. He tutored the British ambassador Lord Cathcart's sons when they sailed to Russia in 1768. Letter XLI contains Richardson's description of fireworks and illuminations in the 'feasts, balls, concerts, plays... and masquerades in constant succession' [Ibid., p. 313] that honored Prince Henry of Prussia (1726–1802), as he arrived in St. Petersburg to form an agreement on the First Partition of Poland. Richardson records that:

...We had lately a most magnificent shew of fireworks. They were exhibited in a wide space before the Winter Palace; and, in truth, "beggared description." They displayed, by a variety of emblematical figures, the reduction of Moldavia, Wallachia, Bessarabia, and the various conquests and victories atchieved [sic] since the commencement of the present war. The various colours, the bright green, and the snowy white, exhibited in these fireworks, were truly astonishing. For the space of twenty minutes, a tree adorned with the loveliest and most verdant foliage, seemed to be waving as with a gentle breeze. It was entirely on fire; and during the whole of this stupendous scene, an arch of fire, by the continued throwing of rockets and fireballs in one direction, formed as it were a suitable canopy [Ibid., p. 330].

Similar to Justice and Cook, Richardson points to illuminated allegorical figures that depict recent conquests in the War of the Bar Confederation (1768–1772). Richardson emphasizes the spectacle's influence upon his senses when he recounts the 'various colours' that were 'truly astonishing'. His astonishment not only underscores the pleasure that the fireworks

elicited but also, like Cook, their powerful emotional impact. The fact that Richardson describes how the spectacle affects his sense experience, which confounds him with sudden passion, indicates how the illuminations limit his capacity to think. Indeed he admits that the display ‘beggared description’, quoting Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606), when Antony fatefully views the visually stunning Cleopatra [Shakespeare, 2.2.208].<sup>22</sup> They ‘beggared description’ because, like Cleopatra, the fireworks and the emblematic illuminations overwhelm the spectator’s capacity to articulate sense experiences when confounded with passion. Cook reinforces the connection between the spectacle, his senses and passion when he remarks that the whole constituted a ‘stupendous scene’, affirming again the connection between the spectacle’s capacity to amaze, astound and overwhelm.

### Nathaniel Wraxall (1751–1831)

Nathaniel Wraxall powerfully demonstrates the spectator’s emotional response to spectacle when he describes a night at Peterhof. After serving in the East India Company from 1769 to 1772, Wraxall traveled extensively in Europe and afterward published his popular *Cursory Remarks Made in a Tour* (1775). Wraxall’s brief stay in the imperial capital gave him enough time to witness Catherine’s illuminations at Peterhof:

The illuminations in the gardens far surpass any I ever saw in my life. In these, as also in fire-works of every kind, I am assured the Russians excel any nation of Europe. Two prodigious arcades of fire extended in front of the palace: the canal, which reaches to the gulf of Finland, was illuminated on both sides, and the view terminated by a rock, lighted in the inside, and which had a beautiful effect. From either side of the canal went off long arched walks illuminated; and beyond these, in the woods, were hung festoons of lamps differently coloured. All the jets d’eaux played. Artificial cascades, where the water tumbled from one declivity to another, and under each of which lights were very artfully disposed, amused and surprised the spectator at the same time [Wraxall, p. 213–214].

Wraxall describes the illuminations and fireworks in a spectacular, sensuous manner, similar to Cook and Richardson. They are ‘beautiful’, ‘differently coloured’, ‘brilliant’ and ‘dazzling’ while they ‘amused and surprised the spectator’. Like Richardson, Wraxall focuses on the sense experience of the spectacle and its powerful, pleasurable effect upon the spectator, but he then describes how this sensual experience affected his mind: ‘The senses alone are captivated, and leave neither time nor capacity to reason on the nature of the entertainment they proffer, but whirl us away in an impetuosity which is not to be resisted’ [Ibid., p. 214]. Illuminations overpower his senses

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<sup>22</sup> The original phrase is ‘beggared all description’.

and threaten his 'capacity to reason'. That is, the spectacle powerfully 'whirls' him away in a process that cannot be 'resisted'. He adds: 'It is a kind of short intoxication, the delirium of a few hours, when reason resigns her scepter, and leaves us to the guidance of any sense which happens to predominate' [Wraxall, p. 215]. Sober Reason cedes to capricious senses, which are directed by the spectacular performance. Literally, the spectacle limits his reason and keeps him in thrall to his passions. After experiencing the illuminations for most of the night until morning, Wraxall noted that a torpor fell over his body after he experiences the brief 'magic' or 'enchantment' of the spectacle. He experiences physical exhaustion, which he 'had not felt before'. Wraxall describes the spectacle's effect upon his body and senses as if he were under a spell. When he arrives in town at eight o'clock, he comments: 'I threw myself on the bed, quite spent with the pursuit of pleasure, and glad to retire to silence and requiescence' [Ibid., p. 216].

Wraxall's description underscores how the pleasure of fireworks and illuminations overwhelm the spectator with their magnificence but also overpower the spectator's senses by stimulating his passions and limiting his capacity to reason. Pointedly, the fireworks and illuminations function in the same capacity as British critiques of Russian citizens' attachment to custom and tradition. Just as custom and tradition prevent Russian citizens from sufficiently exercising their capacity to reason, the fireworks and illuminations prevent the British spectator from exercising his. That is, when confronted with the grandeur of spectacle, which symbolically represents the greatness of the reforming tsar's person and the imperial state, the spectators relinquish their capacity to reason.

When examined from British debates upon greatness and liberty, Wraxall's account of fireworks and illuminations demonstrates the contradiction in the British 'juxtaposition'. Even though the British describe Russian spectacle as an instrument for the reforming tsar, who promotes union and reforms for 'the good of his empire', by bringing liberty and enlightenment to the unreasonable masses, British travellers' depictions of the tsar's and the imperial state's spectacle demonstrate how the performances deny the spectator or citizen of his internally driven, deliberative and discriminating capacity to reason. In short, the reform that is propelled and promoted by the tsar's spectacle occurs at the expense of citizens' ability to choose based upon their interest. Greatness occurs at the expense of liberty.

This contradiction indicates why other British thinkers, like David Hume, reject Bolingbroke's patriot king in the balance between greatness and liberty.<sup>23</sup> Hume even uses Peter the Great as an example in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*

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<sup>23</sup> This is not an original claim; see Armitage, who indicates that after Bolingbroke, 'Future appeals to the compatibility of empire and liberty within British political discourse would henceforth seem either doomed or paradoxical' [Armitage, 2004, p. 42]; Hume instead focuses upon the stability of the rule of law and a mixed constitution; see [Haakonssen, p. 358, 371–372].



(1787). Hume states: traditional or absolute monarchies,<sup>24</sup> ‘receiving their chief stability from a superstitious reverence to priests and princes, have commonly abridged the liberty of reasoning, with regard to religion, and politics, and consequently metaphysics and morals’ [Hume, I.XIV.30]. A free government possesses security of laws<sup>25</sup> that allow people to exercise their curiosity and make choices, which are based upon their ability to reason, so that they may make the right decisions in relation to politics and morals.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, absolute monarchies encourage ‘reverence’ for the state,<sup>27</sup> which prevents citizens from reasoning and choosing independently. Hume points to Peter the Great:

We are told, that the late Czar, though actuated with a noble genius... yet professed an esteem for the TURKISH policy... where the judges are not restrained by any methods, forms, or laws. He did not perceive, how contrary such a practice would have been to all his other endeavours for refining his people. Arbitrary power, in all cases, is somewhat oppressive and debasing; but it is altogether still worse, when the person, who possesses it, knows that the time of his authority is limited and uncertain... He governs the subjects with full authority, as if they were his own; and with negligence or tyranny, as belonging to another. A people, governed after such a manner, are slaves in the full and proper sense of the word; and it is impossible they can ever aspire to any refinements of taste or reason [Ibid., I.XIV.11].

Despite the fact that Peter was ‘actuated with a noble genius’ and that he endeavored to refine his people, he governs his subjects with ‘full authority’ without the restraint of ‘laws’. That is, even though he may be a reforming tsar, he rules with ‘arbitrary power’, which is ‘oppressive and debasing’. He rules with ‘full authority’ as if his subjects were his own, in essence, turning his subjects into ‘slaves in the full and proper sense of the word’ [Forbes, p. 156–157]. For Hume, the tsar’s subjects are ‘slaves’ because they cannot independently exercise their ‘liberty of reasoning’ to ‘aspire to any refinements of taste’. In short, even though Hume acknowledges Peter the Great’s genius and his policy of reform, the philosopher insists that these reforms fail to sufficiently refine his people because his policies and objectives deny the people’s capacity to choose. For Hume, Peter the Great demonstrates why

<sup>24</sup> Haakonssen states that Hume contrasts traditional monarchies with civilized monarchies, such as Louis XV’s France where ‘civil order is maintained by the enforcement of law; and ‘society can be left alone, and this freedom, combined with the need for foreign goods, eventually lead to the growth of commerce’ [Haakonssen, p. 367].

<sup>25</sup> Dees states, “Liberty... requires a steady government” [Dees, p. 400]; for “free governments,” see [Forbes, p. 154].

<sup>26</sup> Wulf discusses the need to cultivate ‘mitigated skepticism’ in citizens and ‘liberal commercial republics’ [Wulf, p. 93–94]; see [Pocock, ch. 7, especially p. 131]; see also Forbes: “The reconciliation of absolute monarchy and law is... brought about by the progress of reason and civilization” [Forbes, p. 156].

<sup>27</sup> Haakonssen observes that in ‘society and politics, the superstitious person is disposed to accept established forms and powers as inherent in the nature of things and to see society as a hierarchical structure with a monarch as the unitary source of authority and sovereignty as a divine right’ [Haakonssen, p. 342].

Bolingbroke's patriot king cannot work. Citizens either revere the monarch or the monarch imposes reforms upon them; either way, citizens are prevented from exercising their reason to refine their taste or perfect their virtue.

Even though British thinkers, like Hume, avoid stressing the monarch's role in greatness and liberty, even pointing to Peter as an example, ironically British descriptions of the Russian Empire continue to use the contradictory 'juxtaposition' and depict the tsar as a type of patriot king who unifies and reforms the irrational populace. For example, in William Coxe's influential *Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden, and Denmark* (1784), the clergyman describes Catherine the Great similar to Perry's description of Peter, as a reforming tsar, who strives to emend Russians' attachment to custom and tradition. Referring to Catherine, Coxe says that 'the sovereign of this empire is absolute in the most unlimited sense of the word' [Coxe, p. 83]; yet, she has 'repealed... oppressive laws' for the peasants and 'has given a stability to their freedom' [Ibid., p. 116]. Ironically, the tsarina, whose rule is 'absolute', gives stability to the peasants' 'freedom'. That is, Coxe continues to use the notion of the reforming tsar who acts for the good of her people by correcting their irrational attachment to custom and tradition. If the Russian Empire functions as the Other in defining Britain's own burgeoning empire, then in light of British thinkers' views on greatness and liberty and their issues with the patriot king, why do British travellers to Russia persist in employing the contradictory 'juxtaposition' of barbaric populace and enlightened monarch, when British travellers' responses to the tsar's and imperial state's spectacle, for example, indicate that it denies spectators and citizens of their critical sense?

A means to investigate this contradiction resides in P. J. Marshall's distinction between the British Empire in the Atlantic before the 1760s, in which liberty would be fostered, versus the British Empire from the 1760s, particularly in India, in which 'enlightened' authoritarianism would be applied. Marshall states that whereas 'representative institutions' existed in the Americas, 'British liberty could not be extended to India'. That is, 'Indians were to be ruled by methods thought to be appropriate to them. Strong government powers would be used for what was considered to be the good of the people. Although there was no place for Indian representation, Indians would be guaranteed security for their lives and property under the law. British rule would thus be "enlightened" if, of necessity, authoritarian', and this 'Indian model of authoritarian government would be exported to Asia and the rest of Africa [excluding the south]' [Marshall, 1998, p. 16]. Whereas liberty works well for the Atlantic empire, 'enlightened' authoritarianism works better for the 'methods thought to be appropriate to (India and Asia)'.

Even though Marshall discusses India, several points intersect with British views of Russia. Particularly, the tsar possesses 'strong government powers', which are used to reform for the 'good of the people'. Additionally Europe and Britain frequently considered Russia as an oriental country –

i. e., Hume's suggestion of 'Turkish policy'.<sup>28</sup> Further, regarding religion, although a Christian nation, Russia was not Protestant, contrasting with Armitage's definition of the pre-1760 British Empire of 'Protestant, commercial, maritime and free'. Even still, what distinguishes Russia from India is that after Peter the Great's reign, Europeans saw Russia, according to Iver Neumann, as 'a culture ambiguously poised between Europe and Asia' [Neumann, p. 84; see also: Wolff, p. 13]. That is, Russia is thought to possess Western and Asian elements, such as Western Enlightenment and Asian backwardness. Since, as Marshall argues, forms of governance are distinguished between regions – i. e., liberty in the Atlantic versus 'enlightened' authoritarianism for 'the good of the people' in Asia – then pre-1760 Russia ostensibly serves as a model Other that successfully incorporates contradictory Eastern and Western elements to achieve imperial greatness.

Recognizing Russia's greatness, Anthony Brough, a merchant in the East India Company, states in *A View of the Importance of the Trade between Great Britain and Russia* (1789): 'There is no nation on the records of history, that has so rapidly risen from a state of darkness and barbarism, to that height of splendor and civilization' [Brough, p. 44]. Russia's splendor and greatness is realized and expressed through the tsar's and imperial state's spectacle in British accounts, which depict how the tsar operates as a type of patriot king who unifies and reforms at the expense of liberty. As such, the tsar and Russian Empire function as a model for the development of Britain's own empire after 1760. That is, British responses to the tsar's spectacle demonstrate that the British possessed the political ideology in the patriot king and an example in the tsar as well as the conception of different governance for different regions and an example in the Russian Empire to construct a foundation for an empire that successfully incorporates the greatness-liberty contradiction that subsequently would propel the British Empire's policy of 'enlightened' authoritarianism in India and Asia from 1760.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See note 1.

<sup>29</sup> Pointing to the connection between Toryism and empire after 1760, P. J. Marshall states: 'Even if there was no new Toryism as a major force in politics in the 1760s, authoritarian Tory ideas still found an outlet and traditional Tories strongly supported the coercion of the colonies' [Marshall, 2003, ch. 2, p. 110].

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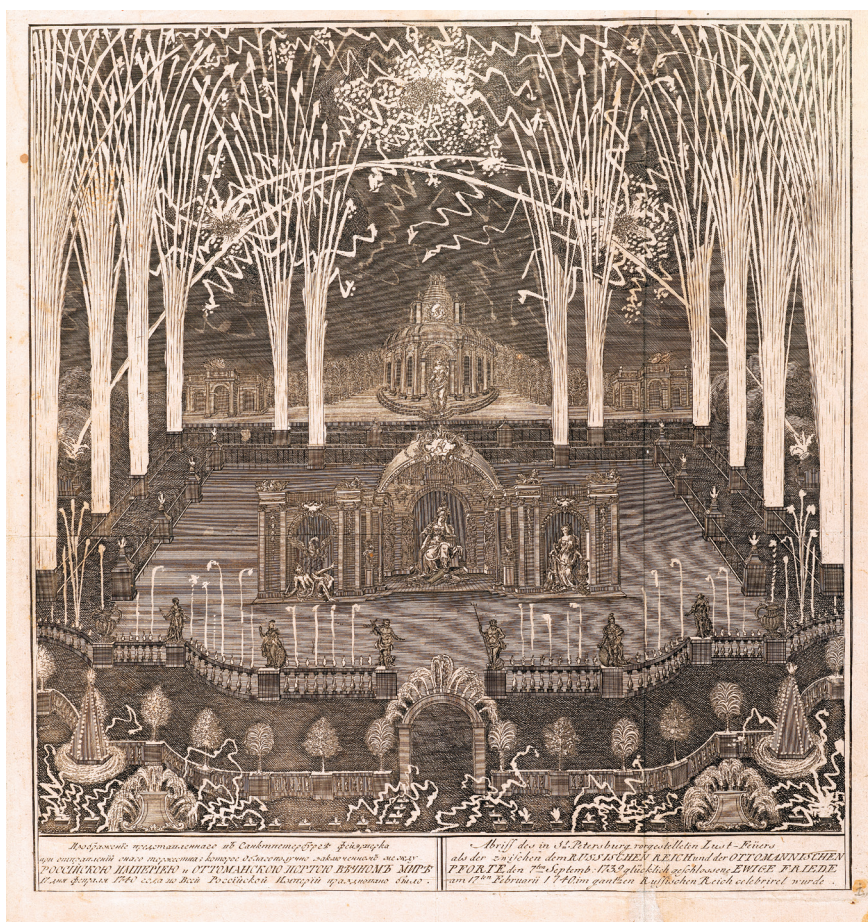
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Fireworks commemorating the end of the Austro-Russian-Turkish War (1735–1739) //  
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